THE THICK OF IT

EPISODE 2

Draft 3

SCENE 13

INT. ABBOT'S OFFICE. DAY

ABBOT AND TUCKER ARE WATCHING THE ZEITGEIST TAPE. ABBOT NODDING OFF.

WE DISTINCTLY HEAR THE WOMAN FROM THE FOCUS GROUP'S VOICE. ABBOT REACTS.

ABBOT

Shit.

TUCKER

I know.

ABBOT

Oh shit.

TUCKER

What?

ABBOT HESITATES.

TUCKER

What is it?

ABBOT

Her. She's the woman from the focus group. She's middle England. She's a fucking actor.

TUCKER

So?

ABBOT

So? She's in the fucking Bill!

TUCKER

Big deal.

ABBOT

Big deal? It means she wasn't for real. What she said wasn't for real. Shit.

TUCKER

Relax Hugh.

ABBOT

We're organizing focus groups to listen to what ordinary people think. Only they're not ordinary people. They're actors playing ordinary people. And we're so in touch with ordinary people we can't tell when ordinary people are actually actors and not technically people at all.

TUCKER

Relax. These focus groups do it all the time.

ABBOT

What?

TUCKER

You ring them up. You say I need X number of people for a focus group pronto. They dig up a few punters. But if they can't cobble together a proper cross-section of people they call up a casting agency. 'Send me an ABC1, semi-gay, demi-metrosexual, right-wing moderate with liberal leanings who's pro-fox-hunting and anti-vivisection'. They send them in. Job done. Everyone's happy.

ABBOT

Do you not think this looks bad?

TUCKER

Maybe it would reflect badly on us if we knew about it. But we don't. It would look bad for the focus group crowd if the public knew about it. But they don't. Who cares? It's their look out.

ABBOT

But she's middle England. We based everything on her.

TUCKER

Well she's obviously a good actor. Well done her. Bravo. A tour de force.

ABBOT

But we based everything on her.

TUCKER

Well not everything. It's a focus group. Key word : group.

ABBOT

You don't understand. We based everything on her.

TUCKER

Oh don't tell me –

ABBOT

We brought her in for a one on one session.

TUCKER

So she knows you based everything on her?

ABBOT

Well … we didn't say that … but … well, yes.

TUCKER

Oh for fuck's sake man. Why?

ABBOT

She was middle England.

TUCKER

So middle England is a big fucking field with one woman living in it?

ABBOT

Now what? What if Hewitt's onto this?

TUCKER

Of course he's fucking onto it. That's why he's writing a focus-group piece. You're damaged, Hugh. This is damage limitation. We have no choice. We leak the story to Heaney. Present the version we want to get out before Hewitt mauls us with his. We say we want to be a listening government. We want to be open. We want a dialogue. Unfortunately, our trust was abused.

ABBOT

Maybe we could say as a result of this we will stop using focus groups.

TUCKER

We're not going to stop using focus groups.

ABBOT

I know that. It's like saying no more spin. Just say it.

Clear the air. Move on.

TUCKER

Good. Yes. I like that. This could work.